

Brief Discussion of Document Types

Categorical Exclusions

Categorical exclusions (CEs) are actions which, based on past experience with similar actions, do not involve significant environmental impacts. They are actions which do not involve significant impacts to planned growth or land use for the area; do not require the relocation of significant number of people, do not have a significant impact on any natural, cultural, recreational, historic, or other resource; do not involve significant air, noise, or water quality impacts, do not have significant impacts on travel patterns; or do not otherwise either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts. Where adverse environmental impacts are likely to occur, the level of analysis should be sufficient to define the extent of impacts, identify appropriate mitigation measures, and address known and foreseeable public and agency concerns.

Three types of CEs exist, the simplest of which is a programmatic categorical exclusion (PCE). A PCE meets the criteria stated in the federal regulation 23 CFR 771.117(c) and does not require the FHWA-Indiana CE/EA form to be completed. Secondly, a statewide categorical exclusion (SCE) does not require FHWA involvement on a project by project basis. SCEs must not have substantial public opposition to the proposed project and must also meet the nine specific conditions listed in the Statewide Categorical Exclusion Determination section in the FHWA-Indiana CE/EA Form. Finally, if conditions for a SCE are not met but the project still qualifies as a CE, it is then classified as a federal categorical exclusion (FCE).

Environmental Assessments/Finding of No Significant Impact

Projects that do not qualify as a CE due to the possible magnitude of the impacts may instead require an Environmental Assessment (EA) to be completed. The primary purpose of an EA is to help the FHWA and INDOT decide whether or not an Environmental Impact Statement is needed. If the project is a major action but does not result in a significant impact, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared.

Environmental Impact Statements

A decision to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a proposed federal action is made when the FHWA determines the action is likely to cause significant impacts on the human environment, the environmental study and/or early coordination indicate significant impacts, or when review of an EA indicates significant impacts.